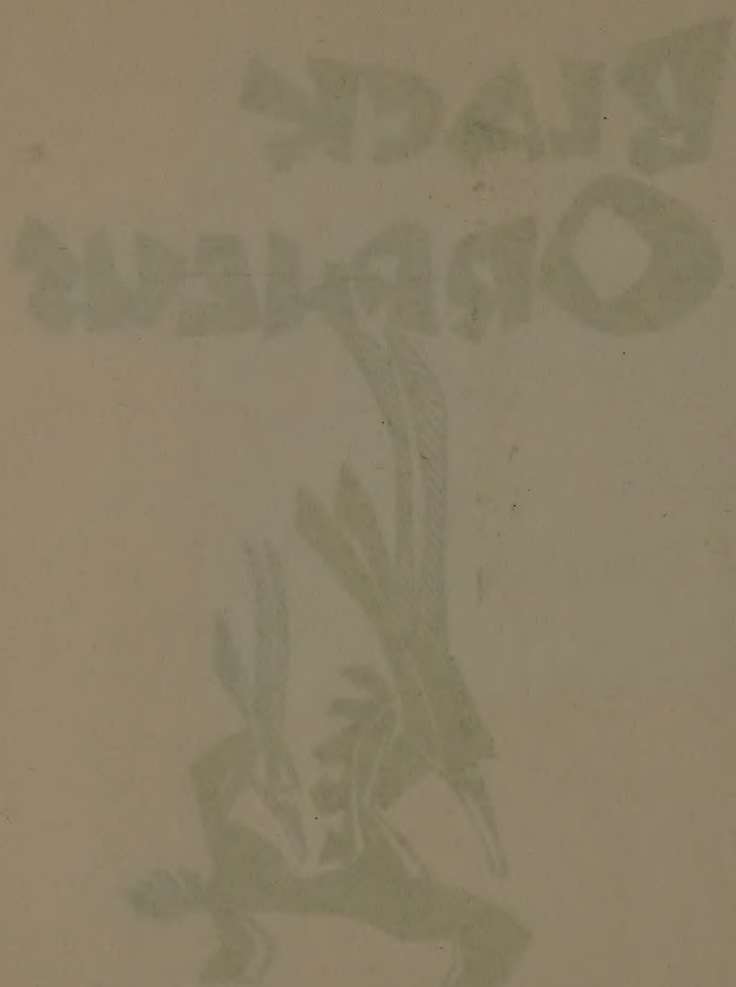


BLACK ORPHEUS



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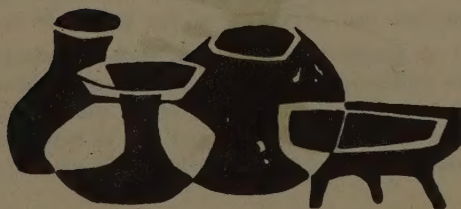
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CONTENTS

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	Page
IJALA : THE POETRY OF YORUBA HUNTERS Adeboye Babalola	5
THE CONFLICT OF CULTURES IN WEST AFRICAN POETRY Ulli Beier	17
POEMS Léopold Sédar Senghor	22
AMOS TUTUOLA Gerald Moore	27
THREE POEMS Gabriel Okara	36
WORLD CONGRESS OF BLACK WRITERS Janheinz Jahn	39
BOOK REVIEWS	47

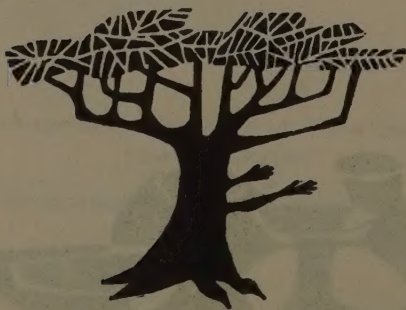


EDITORIAL

A journal devoted to contemporary African literature has long been overdue. The young African writer is struggling hard to build up for himself a literary public in Africa. All too often he has to turn to Europe for criticism and encouragement. It is still possible for a Nigerian child to leave a secondary school with a thorough knowledge of English literature, but without even having heard of such great black writers as Léopold Sédar Senghor or Aimée Césaire. One difficulty, of course, has been that of language; because a great deal of the best African writing is in French or Portuguese or Spanish. "Black Orpheus" tries to break down some of these language barriers by introducing writers from all territories in translation.

"Black Orpheus" will also publish the works of Afro-American writers, because many of these are involved in similar cultural and social situations and their writings are therefore highly relevant to Africans.

While it is the primary purpose of this journal to encourage and discuss contemporary African writing, we shall not forget the great traditions of oral literature of the African tribes. For it is on the heritage of the past, that the literature of the future must be based.



IJALA

THE TRADITIONAL POETRY OF YORUBA HUNTERS

BY ADEBOYE BABALOLA

'Ijálá' is speech-like song which is part of the traditional oral literature of the Yoruba people. It is chanted by talented men and women at the religious social gatherings of the devotees of Ogún, the Yoruba god of war and of iron implements. As it can be easily understood, blacksmiths and hunters predominate among the chanters of 'ijálá', and of course these are inevitably farmers also. It is for the purpose of social cheer and hilarity that the chanting is done, while palm-wine and maize beer is being freely drunk by all those present. It often follows sacrifices offered to the god of war at his shrine. The women involved are wives or relatives of the men.

Other occasions of 'ijálá' chanting are during the periods of hard work by farmers on their farms. Ijálá then serves the purpose of 'music-while-you-work', cheering the farmer, making him work faster and longer, and helping to make his work not a burden but a delight for him: be it the removal of weeds, the clearing of a fresh farm plot in the forest, the making of soil-mounds with the hoe, the harvesting of crops, or the tapping of the palm trees for wine.

Long narrative 'ijálás' are rare. At least that is so in the area of my own limited research namely: my hometown, Ipetumodù, and at Yábá and Igbóbi near Lagos. In Yorùbáland as a whole, long narrative ijálás may be more frequent. Most of the ijálás that I have heard and written down merely express one odd thought after another about almost anything in the life of the Yorùbá but especially about forest birds and animals, domestic human relations, admonitory words for correct conduct in society, character portraits (usually flattering) of friends and acquaintances, and traditional mythology.

A large number of these ijálás seems to belong to the common oral heritage of the Yorùbá proper—those speaking the Oyó dialect—though from place to place differences in their wording can be observed due to differences in local dialects. But also large is the number of ijálás which are being composed impromptu from day to day by the talented men and women at their social

gatherings with the oft-declared aid of alcoholic drinks. To my surprise, one òlálá chanter told me bluntly: "No one can chant òlálá commendably without drinking some wine or beer in the process."

Òlálá can truly be termed poetry. They are produced by a spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions—they are an expression of strong feeling from the depth of the poet's personality. Moreover, the euphony of the words of òlálá and the associated rhythm of the chant further qualify òlálá for citizenship in the realm of poetry.

I admit that I have not yet succeeded in discovering the various rhythm-patterns in òlálá, but it is obvious that the rhythm is always there and to my mind it is most likely based on the tonal variations in the pitch of the vowel sounds: middle tone, high tone, low tone, and combinations of these.

It is usual for the end of one òlálá which, as I have explained, is speech-like song, to be marked with a short, real-song refrain introduced by the chanter of the òlálá and joined in by the entire audience before the next òlálá begins. It is only thus that real music is associated with òlálá, for the short song may be accompanied with drumming.

These songs are usually quite short, and their subject matter is not necessarily connected with the preceding òlálá: Here are some examples:

Ogun is a god.
Anyone who knows Ogun
Must not jest with Ogun.
Ogun is a god.

Ohanhan arrives from the farm of laughter.
A jester arrives.
Ohanhan arrives from the farm of laughter.
(This is sung to greet the arrival of another òlálá singer).

Come on, lead the way to your home!
Come on, lead the way to your home!
It's wrong to keep someone's company
Without a visit to his home some time.
Come on, lead the way to your home!

Lálálákùbèrù !
Thus the Arabic Moslem prayer sounds to my ears.
Were I a Moslem man,
I should top my class in prayer-saying.
Lálálákùbèrù !
Thus the Arabic Moslem prayer resounds.

Death never makes friends with anyone
So just go on eating anything you have.
Death never makes friends with anyone.

To chant Ijálá well is a matter of natural talent, though training and practice are important. There are subtle differences between the voice tone of Ijálá and those of other forms of Yoruba song such as 'rara' (chants in praise of a noble citizen) 'ege' (laments for great men) 'ofo' (magical incantations) 'ogede' (a kind of 'ofo', supposed to be most efficient) 'ewi ogun' (songs for the god of war) and 'oriki' (praise names). It is quite common to hear a good Ijálá singer say without apology that he does not have the voice for 'ege' or 'ogbere'.

Translating Ijálá is not an easy task. Many words used by the chanters are obsolete, and others, particularly names, are untranslatable. Take for example a name like "Alegongopetuebaona". This can be split up into the following components:

a	— a prefix meaning 'he who'
le gongo	— 'crouches sportingly'
petu	— contracted from pa etu 'to kill an antelope'
eba ona	— the side of the road.

It is of course not possible to build up an English compound noun as complex as this.

A further difficulty is, that it is often impossible to find the English equivalents of the names for plants and animals of the bush, that abound in the hunters' poetry.

Yoruba poetry has neither rhyme nor regular metre. The 'line' of Ijálá poetry is the sense group and its length varies. It was therefore considered that English blank verse might be the best medium of translation. The longish sense-groups of Ijala could hardly be contained in a shorter line than the decasyllable one.



KUJOWU AND THE ELEPHANTS

Kújòwú is the son of Oterò, the son of a man
Who always puts an "etu" limb among
The offerings of his sacrifice to idol-gods.
His wife once told him that she wished to have
An ivory neck-chain such as all farmers' wives possessed.
So Kújòwú dipped his hands into a pot
Of specially concocted herbs and snails,
Several times repeatedly, to invoke
Good luck upon himself. Then he left home,
And quick, to hunt within the thickest jungle bounds,
He pursued his way along footpaths,
Chanting hunters' ballads as he went.
News had reached his ears that the elephant
Did sometimes have its meals at Aróòpo;
He had also heard that in Aròbàdàn
The elephant was sometimes seen to feed.
Yet he first sought the elephant with care
At Réfùréfù, but he missed it there.
Therefore he went next to Rèfùrèfù;
But even there he missed the elephant.
Then he shifted ground and went far away
Till he reached Aróòpo at which place
He found two elephants both eating leaves
Of "mòdúmòdu" trees.
At once the elder of the elephants
Called Kújòwú by his name,
Kújòwú the son
Of Arápáeransèkúnlè Oya.
And then it bade him seek no elephant,
Reminding him that elephants were called
Láysko Oròkulábèbèjà;
Oròségiwówòwógbègilo.
Kújòwú replied that he would not desist
From hunting them; that if they rushed on him
Within the forest heart, he would flee from them
By being metamorphosed into a tree.
If they pursued him to savannaland,
He would become a tall grassplant and so escape.
And if they chased him to an anthill land,
He would become a chief among the ants.

The elephants then warned Kújòwú repeatedly.
They spoke and spoke but Kújòwú did not leave.
He stood there still and presently he said:
"As the gourd we eat shoots forth many creepers
But instead of wagging them aggressively
It keeps them very passive on the ground,
And as the "tètè" vegetable-shoots,
When longest, trail themselves upon the soil,
And also as a young boy fails to root
Efficiently from earth in garden-plots
Many weeds that are by name "òsépòtu",
So may you elephants feel incapable
As you try to injure me, and so may you
Be made inactive by my spell."
The elephants now changed themselves to baobab-trees.
And in despair Kújòwú went back home.
There he quickly summoned all his wives to him
And charged them with the sin of adultery
Committed while he was away from home.
His first-wed wife then said
She knew the charge was cruel and wholly false.
She would divorce Kújòwú and go elsewhere,
Especially as up till then she had
Not got the ivory neck-chain that she ought to have
Being as she was a hunter's first-wed wife.
So Kújòwú dipped his hands two times again
Into the pot of choice decocted drug,
And at once went back to see the elephants.
Again the beasts forbade him to draw near,
Re-telling him their attributive names:
"Erin Lásko Oròkúlábèbèjà".
And instantly the senior elephant
Made three high heaps of earth,
And told Kújòwú, "Don't dare to climb o'er these!"
Kújòwú replied by climbing o'er the first.
At this the beast spoke with a human voice,
"Though you have dared to climb o'er that first heap,
Be not so bold to climb the second one."
Yet Kújòwú once more disobeyed the beast.
So for the third time the elephant gave
Decree: "Kújòwú, if you dare to climb
And cross my third heap, I will strangle you."
Then Kújòwú scaled the third.

Immediately, the elephant, enraged,
 Caught hold of him with its powerful trunk,
 And Kújòwú sang to it a pleading song:
 "Erin Laiko, I now submit to you,
 Let mercy carry me to town,
 And not to your retreats in forest bowers.
 This is my humble plea because I want
 My wives to know my present wretched plight."
 To this the elephant replied in song:
 "The Elephant is climbing Alò Hill,
 And as he walks on, he will snort at will.
 The Elephant is climbing Alò Hill."
 So to the Lion's house the elephant
 Soon brought Kújòwú for penalty deserved,
 Before the Lion, king of all the beasts.
 The King told Kújòwú to stand on guard
 Before the main gate of his palace-wall.
 There Kújòwú is still alive today,
 A guard on duty at the Lion's gate,
 Wearing a scarlet cloth as his official dress.
 This Kújòwú, it is, believed by all, was born
 At Agó-Owu in Ikirè Town.

MYSTERY AT ERIN

Of Erin in Moje district I sing:
 Of a giant tree, very tall and large,
 Which crashed and blocked a salient footpath at Erin,
 And so prevented the slaves of Elerin,
 The king of Erin, from going to work on his farm.
 It also confined his sons and daughters
 To the town, making it impossible
 For them to go and play on the demesne.
 One day, one of the Councillors disdained the tree
 As soon as he saw it, and he declared,
 "I will go home and fetch my wonder-working axe,
 And with it I will return immediately
 To make a useful tunnel-road straight through the tree."
 With arrogance unparalleled he spoke.

And as if to humble him, this great tree,
 Before the man returned, transformed itself
 Into a long, colossal tree of brass,
 An "agogo" tree having round its stem
 Sixteen thick creepers tightly interlaced.
 [In case you think that this is not authentic,
 Ask about it from any one you see,
 From any one you come across at Erin,
 And I am sure that he will bear me out.]
 In their perplexity, the people of Erin,
 With reverent homage and appropriate rites
 Invoked their gods—all twenty minus four
 Near that mysterious tree, beseeching each
 To cut it up and clear it off for them.
 Of these Powers-that-be, the first fifteen did not succeed.
 It was the sixteenth god who did the trick.
 Thus came the various gods and goddesses:
 Olúfón reached there first, but, alas, he failed.
 Erinlè reached there next, but, alas, he failed,
 Oglyán reached there next, but, alas, he failed,
 Osà Osun reached there next, but, alas, she failed,
 Osà Obé reached there next, but, alas, he failed,
 Osà Oya reached there next, but, alas, she failed,
 Osà Sàngó reached there next, but, alas, he failed,
 Oníkónkótó next came, but, alas, he failed,
 Orisà Okè next came, but, alas, he failed,
 Agbònnà next came, but, alas, he failed,
 Orisà Ogún next came, but, alas, he failed,
 Osányìn was the helpful god that day —
 Osányìn the one-legged, man-like god.

In token of their gratitude to him,
 The King, Councillors, and People of Erin
 Presented to Osányìn two hundred slaves,
 Two hundred children, two hundred women,
 And two hundred men; also two hundred snails,
 Two hundred tortoises, two hundred goats,
 Two hundred sheep, and two hundred chickens.
 To their benefactor all these they gave.
 And so Osányìn became a very wealthy god.

THE ELEPHANT

About the elephant of whom you speak,
Please forgive my interposing a few words.
The elephant is, undoubtedly, not
Quite like what you have made him out to be.
Ah! the elephant whom we also call
Oriribobo Oriribobo

Orirfowóméwèwájúwe;

The elephant whom man respects perforce,
And points towards with all his fingers ten.
Just as builders roof a house but not its yard,
So hunters treat the elephant differently
Compared with how they treat the other animals,
The elephant to whom we also give

These attributes: Erin Gbágbálóro

Abirintikò, in acknowledgment

Of his royal gait, grave, erect, and slow.

The elephant who has white arrows of bone

For teeth; the husband of Abádàtù —

Half a word is sufficient for the wise!

Now, please sing the chorus of this song with me.

'Not yet enough' are the choral words.

Solo

My abuse of you will soon be enough.
Mucous are your nostrils like an old man's.
Two large wallets of flesh hang from your neck.
Because you eat broad beans voraciously.
Your cheeks are distended laterally.
Very much like those of the big bush rat.
My abuse of you will soon be enough.
It was not I who made this dainty song.
It was my friend, Ogúnrlndé of Owèrà,
The son of Jósíre, who taught me that
I should never work too long on the farm
Since I am not a slave; nor should I there
On any day do only such work
As would make me get back to town too soon,
For I am not of sluggard parentage.
Instead, I should daily return from farm to town
Just at a decent time in the evening.
He also taught me saying, "My friend, please note

Chorus

Not yet enough.
Not yet enough.
Not yet enough.
Not yet enough.
Not yet enough.
Not yet enough.
Not yet enough.
Not yet enough.

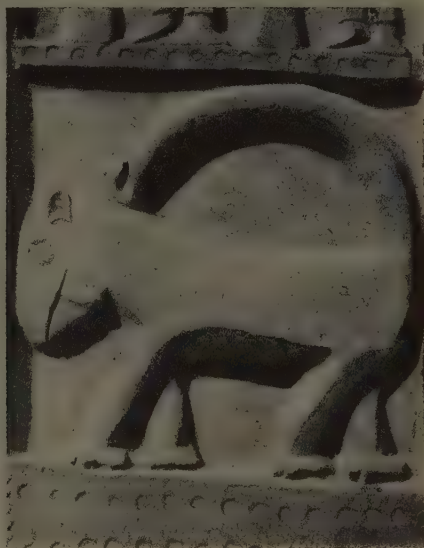


Hunting Scenes from a carved
Yoruba Door (Palace of Ikare)





Hunting Scenes from a carved
Yoruba Door (Palace of Ikare)



Whenever you are going with me, your halting friend,
 Along a forest trail or a bush path,
 Walk neither before me nor behind me,
 For it's unwise to walk immediately
 Following or preceding a lame-footed man.
 If you precede him, you thereby tempt him
 To imitate wood-peckers and peck you,
 And if you dog him, you thereby tempt him
 To fall backwards on you, in languishment.
 Therefore you must see to it that you're ne'er
 Closely before or behind a halting man.
 If you have to walk in such a man's company,
 Closely walk abreast with him by his side.
 And, now, may I finish with another song?:
 "You girl, who say I've stayed too long from town,
 Know that your cheeks are rough like dry bean-cakes.'

HE SAYS IT IS ALL RIGHT

He says it is all right, it's surely right,
 For the foolish man does not mind at all
 Receiving as a gift things which have been
 Already placed as sacrificial dues
 Sprinkled with palm oil in bowls of calabash
 Deposited for gods at a crossroads
 Or before a boulder-altar in the streets.

The courage of a boy is never such
 As to embolden him to meet the god of fate.
 Neither is any boy ever so bold
 As a man who fearlessly takes and eats
 Any good food that he finds left as sacrifice
 By the highway side; and yet such a man
 Is far less daring than Eshu is.

Oh! Look there! The Masquerader Olóló
 Is returning to his vestry in his shrine,
 Olóló Agbogooyè, the masquerader
 Who parades the streets at the ceremony

Of installation for a new, town chief.
The truncheon that he bears is made from "edun" wood,
"Edun", that tree which grows so very high
In its old age, and whose wood has been nicknamed
"Baba Mobóomi" which, interpreted, means
'The Father of all sinkers.'

A song which is now in vogue throughout our town
Has words of timely warning for all thieves:
"You have burgled first a Christian's home,
And, next, you have robbed a hunter's home,
Unless you now reform, you will soon fall
Into that temptation which will be your death —
Attempts to steal even from the god of fate himself.

If perchance you wish to know how best to make
A hunter give some of his kill to you,
You will do well to learn these words of mine,
With which I greet my hunter friend, Ojó,
Father to Ilòrí, whene'er I see him going
A hunting in the forest any where,
"Bí e bá mbò, e se mi 're,
Bàbá 'Lòrí t'ó pèsè òyà bí eni pèsè àgbàdò."
That is a plea that he be kind to me
On his returning from successful hunt,
But notice that I also give him praise
For the diligence with which he pursues
The tracks of beasts for game, walking as slowly
As one would walk in furrows on a farm
While planting maize at the rainy season's start.
And notice too that I delight his heart
By addressing him as "Father to Ilòrí."

Will you agree with me in this belief
That, by and large, our present, reigning king
Is indeed a sovereign wise, good, and firm?
Witness in particular the pleasing fact
That in his reign our harvests have been large,
And almost all of us have had prosperity
So that we've built more houses in the town
And our comforts have been growing gradually;
And we have made, at his command, good streets
Which beautify the town; and, moreover,

By his decree, old dunghills have become
Market sites, better assets to our town.

On the motor-road which leads to Ibàdàn,
A gang of highway men, "The sons of Otete",
Are certainly bedevilled human beings,
Just yesterday they were arraigned in court
For their sixth charge, but, as before, they won.

One day, on my way to Ilé-Ifè,
Ifè Ondáiyé, that ancient town so-named
Because the earliest settlers there belonged
To one single family inhabiting
Only one compound, which has, as it were,
Since then expanded and formed the present town,
And because, as many current legends say,
The first man-and-wife were made there by God.
As I was saying on my way to Ilé 'fè
En route to Aje, where my wife's relations live,
(Aje, a district of tall oil-palms
Totalling twenty thousand at the least —
But, alas, in any harvest season,
Only half of them bear fruit satisfactorily.)
As I was going, I overtook a group
Of merry people who were also walking
To Aje and at their request I joined them.
Soon, to my surprise, they burst out singing.
As follows :

"Our home is at Aje,
And since it's wrong for us to walk with you
Without your having told us where your own home is,
We now ask you, 'Where is your own home, friend ?
Our home is at Aje."

Have you heard the news that in Irèsà
The average house-wife seldom stays at home
During the day, and so evades the work
Of cooking lunch for her husband and her lord,
If he is then in town, doing no farm-work,
But doing some other work or doing none at all.
The excuses that she gives are multiform —
Reasons honourable ! A hundred and one !
"Today, I'll make palm oil from oil-palm fruits,

Tomorrow, I shall wash the palm-fruits' peels.
Today, I'll collect newly ripened oil-palm fruits,
And tomorrow is my day for cracking nuts
To get the kernels from the palm-fruits' seeds."

You must know, if you don't already know,
Of my friend Onírèsè Ajísolá,
The son of Awòirà and Kéléògún,
For he's a man of copious generosity.
Whenever I am passing through his town,
Pursuing my way to my Irèsà home,
I cannot but call upon him at his house
To enjoy his bounteous hospitality,
And so my strength recoup and spirits raise
To undertake most happily the rest
Of that long walk from here to Irèsà,
Irèsà, a town founded by a prince who was
By name Omo-Oba Agúdúlépo —
Bémoròòminíjoyè Arèsà,
Whose first offspring was dark in complexion,
But whose second son was light-yellow-skinned,
And who attributed this discrepancy
To the ill-health of his first born, in infancy,
Which he considered due to the darkness
Of the infant's skin, and therefore he desired
That his next child should have an orange hue
To guarantee good health for it continuously.



THE CONFLICT OF CULTURES

IN WEST AFRICAN POETRY

BY ULLI BEIER

The West African poet writing in a European language finds himself in a difficult position. He is almost bound to be a nationalist and more often than not he is actively engaged in the fight for self-government. His poetry is naturally concerned partly with a criticism and rejection of European values—and yet he has to use a European language to express this same rejection!

Some people indeed have ventured the opinion that the West African should write solely in his native language. But such a purist attitude is hardly justifiable when one considers the facts. The modern West African is already a member of a nation and therefore he wishes to be understood beyond the limits of his tribe. Nigeria alone has dozens of languages, and for better or for worse, English has become the lingua franca. While the fostering of the native language and the growth of a literature in these languages is of great importance, yet the development of a literature in English or French has become an additional need.

The poet's paradoxical situation is of course symptomatic of the West African situation as a whole. Those people best qualified to lead the nationalist movement are also the most westernised Africans. Their position is of course perfectly straightforward, while political self-determination looms predominantly in their mind. But with this goal in sight or already achieved, the position becomes more complex. The rejection of foreign rule implies also a rejection of a foreign way of life. It requires therefore a close examination of both foreign and native values. The poets are in the forefront of this intellectual movement, that tries to reassess the relative merits of African and European culture. Often the West African poet looks at traditional African culture, tries to see it with new eyes and reevaluate it. He suffers from the feeling of being "poised between two civilizations" (Imoukhuede) and sceptically examines the value of our own culture with its "dazzling glare of iron and steel" (Dei Anang).

The traditional culture of the African is often mourned as a glorious or

idyllic state that has been lost forever:

'Tis done—but yesterday
The palaces of crowned kings
And now a chaos of hard clay;
Sleeping on the abyss.
Without a surge.

Thus the poet Moru-Yesufu Giwa mourns the lost glory of the ancient kingdom of Benin. In much the same mood, H. Carey Thomas of Liberia regrets the loss of the old ways of life:

The warning drums
The jungle's never failing wireless
No longer beats upon the hills;
The warning cry
The plaintive note
Is hushed among the jungle notes.

David Diop (Senegal) draws an idyllic and nostalgic picture of the African past:

The sun shone in my hut
And my wives were lovely and supple
Like palm trees in the evening breeze.
My children were gliding on the wide river
Over the dangerous depths.....

There are however other voices. Dennis Osadebay (Nigeria) rejects the values of the past outright:

My simple fathers
In childlike faith believed all things;
It cost them much
And their offspring lost a lot;
They questioned not the lies of magic
And fetish seemed to have some logic.
They were deceived by first appearance,
And now I need deliverance.

Interest in the African past seems to him of no value except to the white historian. Traditional African custom is dead, it has no value except as a curiosity:

Don't preserve my customs
As some fine curios
To suit some white historians taste.

Dennis Osadebay insists on his right to "play with the whiteman's ways." The white man appears in his poetry as the liberator from superstition, as the bringer of civilization. In a poem that begins with the words: "Thank you sons and daughters of Britannia," he says:

I'm not ungrateful though I ask
For more and more good things.
I cannot rest
Satisfied with half a loaf or less
When I know you can give the whole bread.

He criticises the white man, not for having destroyed African culture, but for not having introduced enough European culture:

I am half starved;
 I asked for bread they gave me stone.
 I am thirsty;
 They tell the horse to wait a while
 I asked for water they gave me slush.
 Because green grasses would soon grow
 And dry Sahara would yield streams.

How different is H. Carey Thomas who represents the white man as the intruder.
 as the destroyer :

Be warned:
 That palefaced strangers
 With unhallowed feet
 Profane this heritage our fathers gave.

The picture of the white man as an intruder and a brutal conqueror is drawn
 with more bitterness by David Diop :

Then one day silence.....
 The rays of the sun seemed extinct in
 My home void of sense.
 My wives crushed their reddened mouths
 On the hard thin lips of the steel eyed conquerors
 And my children left their peaceful nudity
 For the uniform of iron and blood.

Anger and biting irony are strangely mixed in Mabel Imoukhuede's poem :
 "The Second Olympus", which begins :

From the rostrum they declaimed
 On martyrs and men of high ideals
 Whom they sent out
 Benevolent despots to an unwilling race
 Straining at the yoke,
 Bull-dozers trampling on virgin ground
 In blatant violation.
 They trampled down all that was strange
 And filled the void
 With half-digested alien thoughts;
 They left a trail of red
 Wherever their feet had passed.

It is of course easy to understand, that West African poetry is often a poetry
 of protest like the preceding example. Mostly, however, it is less violent and
 approaches the problem in a more reflective manner.

Dei Anang, a poet from Ghana, tries to juxtapose African and European
 values. He criticises European culture as being too exclusively material and of
 being inferior to African culture from a social point of view :

The dazzling glare of iron and of steel
 Sometimes obscures non metal worth;
 So when I disdained my pristine
 Bows and arrows
 And cared not much for iron and steel,
 They called me "dark" in all the world.

But dearer far than cold steel and iron
Is the tranquil art
Of thinking together
And living together.

In another poem he critically examines the loosely used words "backward", "forward" and "superstition" and by putting them into a more precise context he is redefining their meaning. This poem, which attacks the conventional idea of progress, is here quoted in full:

Wither Bound, O Africa ?
Backward ?
To days of drums
And festival dances in the shade
Of sun-kissed palms;
Backward ?
To untutored days
When maid was ever chaste
And lad abhorred unhallowed ways
For dread of ancient gods;
Backward ?
To dark thatched huts
Where kindness reigned
And solace dwelt.
Backward, to SUPERSTITION ?
Or forward ?
Forward ! To what ?
The slums where man is dumped upon man;
Where penury
And misery
Have made their helpless homes,
And all is dark and dreary ?
Forward ! To what ?
The factory
To grind hard hours
In an inhuman mill
In one long ceaseless spell ?

Here again the same criticism of our culture is expressed: that while it succeeds materially, it fails socially, and the poet has once again suggested that African life has aspects that are superior to European life.

But the most powerful—because most poetically expressed—rejection of Western values comes undoubtedly from Léopold Sédar Senghor, the poet from Senegal. It is significant for the whole West African situation, that he, who is perhaps the most perfectly assimilated West African, is also the most articulate critic of Western culture. He who is a member of the French parliament, a one time minister of a French government and widely acknowledged as an exponent of French culture, is at the same time the most consciously "African" among the West African poets.

Perhaps it is because he has penetrated so deeply into Western culture, that he is also so conscious of its particular weaknesses and failures. The skyscrapers of New York, that "defy the storms with muscles of steel and stone glazed hide" are to him the symbol of the hardness and artificiality of Western culture. It may be a powerful culture, but it is not human:

No mother's breast, but only nylon legs. Legs and breasts that
have no sweat nor smell.

No tender word for there are no lips, only artificial hearts
paid for in hard cash."

At first one is dazzled, overwhelmed by its "metallic eyes" and "frosted smile" and "sulphorous light". But soon the soul cries out against this lack of human warmth:

But two weeks on the bare sidewalks of Manhattan
— At the end of the third week, fever seizes you with the
pounce of a leopard.

But Negro culture he proclaims, has preserved some of the vital qualities that Western civilization has lost. It has preserved a closeness to nature, a humanity, a rhythm and a poetry that the West will have to go and search in Africa. The Africans are, he proclaims boldly (in "Prayer to Masks"):

The leaven that the white flower needs.

For who else would teach rhythm to the world that has died
of machines and cannons?

And again, even more drastically expressed in "New York":

New York! I say to you: New York let black blood flow into
your blood

That it may rub the rust from your steel joints, like an oil
of life,

That it may give your bridges the bend of buttocks and the
suppleness of creepers.

Senghor has become so much a European, that he can criticise European culture from the inside. He has gained so much perspective towards traditional African culture, that he can rediscover its value and proclaim its mission to the world. Senghor has, as it were, gone the whole way. So far has he gone in assimilating the foreign culture and in mastering it, that he has been able to achieve a reorientation towards Africa. Today he is one of the foremost leaders of cultural nationalism in French West Africa. His own form of nationalism is not based on the hatred of others, nor on a superficial romanticising of the African past, but on a deep, understanding of the nature of both African and European culture.

The translations of his poems which follow, cannot do justice to the subtle rhythm of the originals. But they will be able to give an idea of the poet's powerful images and of his approach to the problem of conflicting cultures in Africa.

PRAYER TO MASKS

BY LEOPOLD SEDAR SENGHOR

Masks! Oh Masks!

Black mask, red mask, you black and white masks,
Rectangular masks through whom the spirit breathes,
I greet you in silence!

And you too, my pantherheaded ancestor.

You guard this place, that is closed to any feminine laughter, to any mortal
smile.

You purify the air of eternity, here where I breathe the air of my fathers.
Masks of maskless faces, free from dimples and wrinkles,
You have composed this image, this my face that bends over the altar of white
paper.

In the name of your image, listen to me!

Now while the Africa of despotism is dying,—it is the agony of a pitiable
princess

Just like Europe to whom she is connected through the navel,

Now turn your immobile eyes towards your children who have been called

And who sacrifice their lives like the poor man his last garment

So that hereafter we may cry “here” at the rebirth of the world being the
leaven that the white flour needs.

For who else would teach rhythm to the world that has died of machines and
cannons?

For who else should ejaculate the cry of joy, that arouses the dead and the
wise in a new dawn?

Say, who else could return the memory of life to men with a torn hope?

They call us cotton heads, and coffee men, and oily men,

They call us men of death.

But we are the men of the dance whose feet only gain power when they
beat the hard soil.

NEW YORK

BY LEOPOLD SEDAR SENGHOR

(for jazz orchestra: trumpet solo)

I

New York! At first I was confused by your beauty, by those great golden long
legged girls.

So shy at first before your blue metallic eyes, your frosted smile

So shy. And the anguish in the depths of sky-scraper streets

Lifting eyes hawkhooded to the sun's eclipse.

Sulphurous your light and livid the towers with heads that thunderbolt the sky

The sky-scrappers which defy the storms with muscles of steel and stone-glazed
hide.

But two weeks on the bare sidewalks of Manhattan

—At the end of the third week the fever seizes you with the pounce of a
leopard

Two weeks without rivers or fields, all the birds of the air

Falling sudden and dead on the high ashes of flat roof-tops.

No smile of a child blooms, his hand refreshed in my hand

No mother's breast, but only nylon legs. Legs and breasts that have no sweat
nor smell.

No tender word for there are no lips, only artificial hearts paid for in hard cash

And no book where wisdom may be read. The painter's palette blossoms with
crystals of coral.

Nights of insomnia oh nights of Manhattan! So agitated by flickering lights,
while motor horns howl of empty hours

And while dark waters carry away hygienic loves, like rivers flooded with the
corpses of children.

II

Now is the time of signs and reckonings

New York! Now is the time of manna and hyssop.

You must but listen to the trombones of God, let your heart beat in the rhythm of blood, your blood.

I saw in Harlem humming with noise with stately colours and flamboyant smells — It was tea-time at the house of the seller of pharmaceutical products —

I saw preparing the festival of night for escape from the day.

I proclaim night more truthful than the day.

It was the pure hour when in the streets God makes the life that goes back beyond memory spring up

All the amphibious elements shining like suns.

Harlem Harlem! Now I saw Harlem! A green breeze of corn springs up from the pavements ploughed by the naked feet of dancers

Bottoms waves of silk and sword blade breasts, water-lily ballets and fabulous masks

At the feet of police horses roll the mangoes of love from low houses.

And I saw along the sidewalks streams of white rum streams of black milk in the blue fog of cigars.

I saw the sky in the evening snow cotton-flowers and seraphims wings and sorcerers plumes.

Listen New York! Oh listen to your male voice of brass vibrating with oboes, the anguish choked with tears falling in great clots of blood

Listen to the distant beating of your nocturnal heart, rhythm and blood of the tom-tom, tom-tom blood and tom-tom.

III

New York! I say to you: New York let black blood flow into your blood
That it may rub the rust from your steel joints, like an oil of life
That it may give to your bridges the bend of buttocks and the suppleness of
creepers.

Now return the most ancient times, the unity recovered, the reconciliation of
the Lion the Bull and the Tree

Thought linked to act, ear to heart, sign to sense.

There are your rivers murmuring with scented crocodiles and mirage-eyed
manatees. And no need to invent the Sirens.

But it is enough to open the eyes to the rainbow of April

And the ears, above all the ears, to God who out of the laugh of a saxophone
created the heaven and the earth in six days.

And the seventh day he slept the great sleep of the negro.

PARIS IN THE SNOW

BY LEOPOLD SEDAR SENGHOR

Lord, you visited Paris on the day of your birth
Because it had become paltry and bad.
You purified it with incorruptible cold,
The white death.
This morning even the factory funnels hoisted in harmony
The white flags.
"Peace to all men of good will."
Lord, you have offered the divided world, the divided Europe,
The snow of peace.
And the rebels fired their fourteen hundred canons
Against the mountains of your peace.
Lord, I have accepted your white cold that burns worse than salt.
And now my heart melts like snow in the sun.
And I forget
The white hands that loaded the guns that destroyed the kingdoms,
The hands that whipped the slaves and that whipped you
The dusty hands that slapped you, the white powdered hands that slapped me
The sure hands that pushed me into solitude and hatred
The white hands that felled the high forest that dominated Africa,
That felled the Sara, erect and firm in the heart of Africa, beautiful
like the first men that were created by your brown hands.
They felled the virgin forest to turn into railway sleepers.
They felled Africa's forest in order to save civilization that was lacking in men.
Lord, I can still not abandon this last hate, I know it, the hatred of diplomats
who show their long teeth
And who will barter with black flesh tomorrow.
My heart, oh lord has melted like the snow on the roofs of Paris
In the sun of your Goodness,
It is kind to my enemies, my brothers with the snowless white hands,
Also because of the hands of dew that lie on my burning cheeks at night.

AMOS TUTUOLA

A NIGERIAN VISIONARY

BY GERALD MOORE

The young Yoruba writer Amos Tutuola has now published three books in England and has made a considerable reputation for himself throughout Europe and America. Enough material exists for some attempt at a careful and serious assessment of his work; even those who have always been inclined to dismiss him as a "freak" will at least admit that he is now too sizable a freak to be ignored.

The most remarkable feature uniting all three of Tutuola's books is his apparently intuitive grasp of basic literary forms. All his heroes or heroines follow out one variant or another of the cycle of the heroic monomyth, Departure — Initiation — Return (1). In his first books the *Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the variant form is that of the deliberate, limited Quest. The whole book may best be seen as the story of the Drinkard's quest for his dead palm-wine tapster and the trials, labours and revelations he experiences in the course of it. It is thus of the utmost significance that the first of all the trials imposed upon him in his journey is the binding and bringing of Death. The naivety and directness with which this tale is told (Death, for example, is discovered digging in his yam-garden) should not obscure its importance. It stands as a clear enough indication that the Drinkard's adventure is not merely a journey into the eternal African bush, but equally a journey into the racial imagination, into the sub-conscious, into the Spirit World that everywhere co-exists and even overlaps with the world of waking "reality." Or, to express it mythically, he is descending, like Gilgamesh, Orpheus, Heracles or Aeneas before him, into the Underworld, there to confront death itself and attempt to carry off some trophy to the living as a symbol of his mastery over the two worlds.

Once the Drinkard is embarked on his adventure, the familiar figures of heroic myth make their appearance one by one. There are the task-masters who impose certain labours upon him as the price for giving information about

1. For a study of the monomyth see Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, Bollingen Series XVII, Pantheon Books (New York, 1949).

the dead tapster's whereabouts; there is the ever-faithful and helpful female companion (Dante's Beatrice, Theseus' Ariadne, Jason's Medea) in the shape of the Drinkard's wife, whom he rescues from the terrible "complete gentleman" and marries as the reward of his exploit; there is the devouring monster (the Red Fish) who must be slain in order to lift the curse from a whole community and free them from the burden of annual human sacrifice. If the Drinkard encounters fewer magic helpers than his European counterpart would probably need, that is because his own "ju-ju" powers are constantly accumulating; for this book reflects the widespread African belief that whenever a magician is overthrown his powers are immediately transferred to the conqueror. Some of the most interesting episodes, from the point of view of comparative mythology, are the birth of the half-bodied baby from the swollen left thumb of the Drinkard's wife, the meeting with Faithful-Mother in the White Tree, and the Hungry Creature which swallows both the Drinkard and his wife during their homeward journey. The half-bodied baby is a very close parallel to the Tom Thumb of European folklore (the same figure is known in Yoruba as Mogbon juba or Child-Wiser-Than-His-Father). The idyllic stay with Faithful-Mother seems a clear enough example of what Campbell calls the "Meeting with the Mother Goddess" (1), while the White Tree may be identified as the usual tree symbol for the World Navel (Yggdrasil, the Bo Tree, the golden apple-tree in the Garden of the Hesperides, the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden). The sojourn in the belly of the Hungry Creature is certainly the familiar motif of the Whale's Belly from which the hero must emerge reborn, and the manner of the Drinkard's escape is also familiar; he first shoots the Creature dead from inside with a musket and then hacks his way out with a cutlass.

When at last the Drinkard reaches the Deads' Town—the lowest level of Hades—he does not, like Orpheus, enjoy even the chance of getting back to the waking world with his tapster. The tapster sadly explains to him that the dead cannot return with the living, neither can the living dwell with the dead; this is the Drinkard's real Initiation, for thereby he learns the true meaning of life and death. There is an interesting parallel in the ancient Japanese myth of Izanagi and Izanami, told in the "Records of Ancient Matters," though there the unreturning one pursues her would-be rescuer with destructive fury till he is safely back in the land of the living. Nevertheless, the Drinkard does not return empty-handed from his Quest. He wins a boon, though not the one he set out to get, for the tapster gives him a magic egg which will perform anything he asks of it (it may not be too fanciful to see in these magic eggs of folk-lore a regenerated version of the Cosmic Egg from which, according to many mythologies, the whole world was created). So the Drinkard, now a changed man whose past life is dead, for he has undergone his "rite of passage" or education of the soul, sets out on the direct path to his home town. Here Tutuola gives us one of his most appalling visions, for this direct path

1. *op. cit.*, Chapter II, 2.

is filled by an unending stream of dead; but the characteristic twist he gives to this Dante-like prospect is that the most terrible of all the deads are the babies, who ferociously assault everyone in their path. As the Drinkard and his wife near their home they fall in with the Mountain Creatures, who become annoyed and pursue them. There follows a typical example of the Transformation Flight, in the course of which the Drinkard turns himself into a pebble and succeeds in hurling himself across the river which separates them from his town. This river is, of course, the Return Threshold, and in accordance with all the rules of mythology the hero's pursuers can never cross it. It is also in accordance with these rules that the boon-bearing hero shall find his community in a state of anarchy and distress, for otherwise his whole adventure might appear wasted. The Drinkard finds his town suffering from a terrible famine and for a while he is able to relieve it by the use of his egg. But soon human greed and folly defeat him and in a fit of anger he turns the power of his egg against the people. Meanwhile the real cause of the famine remains untouched, for Earth and Heaven, once fast friends, are quarrelling over the seniority, and Heaven is demonstrating his greater power by withholding all rain and dew from the Earth. The Drinkard advises that the famine can only be ended by sending a slave to Heaven with a present acknowledging his seniority. In other words, from henceforth the supreme deity will be the male Sky God and not the old female Earth Goddess, protectress of matriarchy. Thus the famine is ended. One of the most powerful moments in the book is the return of the ghost of the sacrificed slave;

But when the slave carried the sacrifice to Heaven and gave it to Heaven he could not reach halfway back to the earth before a heavy rain came and when the slave was beaten by this heavy rain and when he reached the town, he wanted to escape from the rain, but nobody would allow him to enter his or her house at all. All the people were thinking that he would carry them also to Heaven as he had carried the sacrifice to Heaven, and were afraid.

But when for three months the rain had been falling regularly, there was no famine again.

In this way the resolution of the Drinkard's individual development as hero is linked with the restoration of harmony between man and his gods, for it is the Drinkard's new understanding, won by the hard way of adventure, which enables him to settle the cosmic quarrel through which man is suffering.

Tutuola has managed to impose an extra-ordinary unity upon his apparently random collection of traditional material. The unity is that of intense vision, for Tutuola is a visionary writer and must be seen as such if he is to be understood or effectively judged. A good deal of the criticism of his books has apparently taken it for granted that they are novels, which argues an astounding lack of literary education in the critics concerned. Tutuola's affinities are with Bunyan, Dante and Blake rather than with the Western novel,

for the novel as we know it deals with man in society, while Tutuola is concerned with man alone, suffering and growing amid the images thrown forth by his own mind and by the imagination of his race. He is something much rarer and more interesting than another novelist.

There is an interesting confirmation of the visionary character of his work in Dr. Parrinder's Foreword to *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*. Dr. Parrinder recounts how he once asked Tutuola why he had described the various towns in the Bush of Ghosts in that particular order. Tutuola simply replied, "Because that is the order in which I came to them." He has lived through his material before ever he sets it down; the many fragments of folk-lore, ritual and belief embedded in it are not just things remembered (whether from individual or racial knowledge), but things already experienced; they have all passed through the transmuting fire of an individual imagination and been shaped for its ends.

The comparison with Bunyan is a fruitful one, for both writers are men of little formal education who seize upon the images of the popular imagination.

Take this passage from the "Pilgrim's Progress":

"hidious to behold, he was clothed with scales like a Fish (and they are his pride), he had Wings like a Dragon, and out of his belly came Fire and Smoke, and his mouth was as the mouth of a Lion

This rises into literature from the same great sources as Tutuola's Red Fish in the *Palm-Wine Drinkard*, whose :

head was like a tortoise's head, but it was as big as an elephant's head and it had over 30 horns and large eyes which surrounded the head. All these horns were spread out as an umbrella. It could not walk but was only gliding on the ground like a snake and its body was just like a bat's body and covered with long red hair like strings..... All the eyes which surrounded its head were closing and opening at the same time as if a man was pressing a switch on and off.

This description of the eyes is a brilliant instance of Tutuola's easy use of the paraphernalia of modern life to give sharpness and immediacy to his imagery. The comparisons with the branching stems of an umbrella frame and with hanging pieces of string are equally effective, if less striking than the switch or perhaps the finest example of all is the Drinkard's description of the "complete gentleman," whose beauty was such that even bombers would respect it:

I could not blame the lady for following the Skull as a complete gentleman to his house at all. Because if I were a lady, no doubt I would follow him to wherever he would go, and still as I was a man I would jealous him more than that, because if this gentleman went to the battlefield, surely, enemy would not kill him or capture him and if bombers saw him in a town which was to be bombed, they would not throw bombs on his presence, and if they did throw it, the bomb itself would not explode until this gentleman would leave that town, because of his beauty. At the same time that I saw this gentleman in the market on that day what I was doing was only to follow him about in the

market. After I looked at him for so many hours, then I ran to a corner of the market and I cried for a few minutes because I thought within myself why was I not created with beauty as this gentleman, but when I remembered that he was only a Skull, then I thanked God that he had created me without beauty

If we examine the formal structure of Tutuola's second book, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, we shall find that here there is no deliberate quest or definite objective. The Initiation is not sought but is imposed upon the boy-hero as the process of his development into manhood. The whole book may thus be seen as a kind of extended Initiation or "rite of passage". At the beginning of the story the narrator is a boy of eight and is in a state of innocence. He is just starting to know the meaning of "bad", for he is the victim of the jealousies among his father's wives, but he does not yet know the meaning of "good". Fleeing from his deserted town before a slave-raiding army, he becomes separated from his brother and accidentally rushes into the terrible Bush of Ghosts, which he enters through a hole in a large mound, in a manner somewhat reminiscent of Alice falling into Wonderland. Like Alice again, he immediately undergoes a series of transformations, though his are certainly the more radical; at various times he becomes a cow, a ju-ju stuck in the neck of an immense pot, a horse and a monkey. As he travels or is carried from town to town, deep in the Bush of Ghosts, the boy suffers a breathless variety of experiences, mostly horrible or fearful in character. His status is usually that of a slave or, at best, a resented intruder, though he has rare intervals of peace and gradually becomes more and more contented with his extra-ordinary life. At one time he is even happily married to a ghostess for a few months and later he lives for four years with a beautiful Super Lady, who bears him a son half-ghost, half-mortal, over whose upbringing they finally quarrel.

To the uninitiated European reader the word "ghost" is likely to be rather misleading, for the ghosts of this book are not the individual spirits of those who once lived on earth; they are the permanent inhabitants of the Other World, who have never lived as mortals, but who have intimate knowledge of that life and are in constant intercourse with it. At the same time, it appears that earthly witches and wizards hold their meetings among these ghosts and that it is from there that "spirit-children" are sent to dwell among men and act as agents for the ghost world. None of this is worked out with theological exactitude, for Tutuola assumes this kind of knowledge, but so much at least is clear.

After twenty-five years in the Bush of Ghosts the hero has become so accustomed to life there that he no longer has any wish to escape, but when at last the chance is presented to him by the Television-Handed Ghostess he decides to take it. After still further misfortunes at the hands of his long-lost, unrecognised brother, he returns to normal life with his family. Like Adam, he has lost his innocence and has fallen into a full knowledge of good and evil: he is ready to begin adult life. The closing words of the book, "This is

what hatred did", pick up again the hints of the opening pages and confirm its nature as an extended division of Initiation or Purgatory—though we must understand that this is a purgatory undergone by the living and not by the dead; a preparation for life and not a payment for its past mistakes.

Tutuola's last book, *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle*, was published in 1955. Here the heroic figure is that of a young girl, born with conspicuous advantages of every kind, who comes to feel that these must ultimately be paid for in comparable abasement and suffering. This is a theme as universal in literature and myth as that of the deliberate quest, to whose grand object such abasement and suffering may appear as incidental and subordinate; but in reality they are two different ways of expressing the same life-renewing, regenerating experience. The belief that expense must somehow be balanced by equivalent earning or sacrifice, by a "storing-up", is perhaps the mythic version of the Law of the Conservation of Energy, intuitively apprehended. But in myth it is seen that *man himself*, by heroic action or sacrifice, must renew the energy of his world and keep it in equipoise. This, the theme of *Simbi*, is seen particularly clearly in the great English medieval poems "Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knight" and "Wynner and Wascoeur." For an individualist society it has lost its meaning.

Simbi, we are told, was the only daughter of the wealthiest woman in her village:

She was not working at all, except to eat and after that to bathe and then to wear several kinds of the costliest garments. Although she was a wonderful singer whose beautiful voice could wake deads and she was only the most beautiful girl in the village.

One day her two friends Rali and Sala are kidnapped and soon after this Simbi begins to yearn to experience the "Poverty" and the "Punishment" because she had known "neither the poverty nor the difficulties of the punishment since she was born." Ignoring the warnings of her mother and others, she consults the Ifa priest (the professional diviner of Yoruba society) and he advises her to make a certain sacrifice at that familiar starting point of mythical adventure, "the place where three paths meet". While she is sacrificing, the terrible Dogo comes from behind her and carries her away on the Path of Death. Then she begins to experience the poverty and the punishment with a vengeance, and immediately regrets her obscure impulse, but once embarked on the adventure she must suffer it to the finish. Dogo sells her as a slave in a far town and there she meets again with Rali and Sala and several other girls of her village, 'nameless refugees', who have been kidnapped before her. But Simbi is the only one who has voluntarily brought her sufferings on herself, and the others make her feel it. The little group wanders on from place to place and is several times threatened with human sacrifice and other dangers, but each time they are saved at the last moment by the heroic efforts of Simbi. Sometimes with her companions, more often alone, Simbi struggles

on through her self-imposed agonies. When at last she wins home to her village again, only Rali is left alive to accompany her.

The central experience of the adventure is Simbi's sojourn in the Dark Jungle, the empire of the Satyr. Here ends the Path of Death, and the only way of escape from the Jungle is to return by it. Simbi wanders here for a long time and has many bruising encounters with her terrible enemy the Satyr before she finally conquers and kills him by flying up his nostril in the form of a water-fly (Iromi) and biting him to death. The Satyr of the Dark Jungle is Tutuola's greatest creation, at once comic and terrible. Here he is talking to himself after his first humiliating brush with the resourceful Simbi:

"I believe, the two ladies shall come back to this jungle and I shall kill both of them at all costs at any day I meet them. It is certain, they are my meat!...By the way, what is the meaning of 'Iro....'? of course, I know the meaning of 'Iromi' that is an insect of water, but what of 'Iro...' into which that lady (Simbi) said she could change? Anyhow, we shall meet again and then continue our fight."

The use of the word "lady" in such a context heightens the comedy of the scene. Gentility is a disease in modern Nigeria; no-one is ever described as a "woman", even by a Satyr.

The Satyr's greatest stratagem is when, knowing Simbi's love of singing, he creates a vast hall in the Jungle made entirely of singing birds, so that it is literally built of pure music. Yet even this delightful trap, though Simbi falls into it all right and it rather endears the Satyr to the reader, fails to give him control of her for long. The Satyr carries her to a high rock and, after embedding her in it by turning her partially into stone, proceeds to beat her. But Simbi escapes by the aid of a magic helper and turns herself into a water-fly. Unrecognised by the Satyr, who knows that she can become "Iro...", but not "Iromi", she flies up his nose and kills him in the manner already described.

In *Simbi*, Tutuola has tightened his grasp of narrative, heightened his dramatic sense, and displayed a new speed in the handling of the big scenes. There is far more dialogue than in the earlier books, and the frequent adverbial "stage directions" add greatly to the dramatic interest and humour of the conversation:

"Of course, my wish before I left our village was to seek for the "Poverty" and the "Punishment" but I have regretted it since when Dogo kidnapped me and sold me," Simbi explained coldly. "But before you will regret your wish will be when you return to our village," Bako replied and then she asked sharply from the rest "or is it not so?" "Yes, it is so!" the rest confirmed loudly.

The occasional *longueurs* of Tutuola's earlier books arose from the wholesale application of an oral narrative technique to written narrative. Writing of the *Palm-Wine Drinkard*, Mr. V. S. Pritchett said, "Mr. Tutuola's first paragraph knocks one flat." This is how Tutuola opened his first story:

I was a palm-wine drinkard since I was a boy of ten years of age. I had no other work more than to drink palm-wine in my life. In those days we did not know other money, except cowries, so that everything was very cheap, and my father was the richest man in our town.

The impact of this is that of a warm African voice beginning a tale. Tutuola wrote exactly as if he were entertaining a group of friends with his fantasies on a moonlit night. This purely oral narrative method has many advantages but some pitfalls too. The "live" narrator who has his audience actually round him can afford (if he is a good story-teller) any amount of long-winded digression and embellishment—indeed, that is part of his art. The writer who bases his work on the same method must be much more ruthless with himself, and there were places in Tutuola's first two books where even the appreciative reader might begin to nod a little. It is all very well to knock the reader flat with one's first paragraph, but it is important that none of the later ones should render him comatose. Tutuola has now shown in *Simbi* that he can prune his exuberance fairly drastically without sacrificing any of the warmth and richness of his speaking human voice. When the *Drinkard* first appeared many were inclined to salute it as a once-for-all miracle and to raise a doubt whether even Tutuola could do it again. But in *Simbi* he has not only done it again; he has gone on to show that he can sharpen and refine the expression of his unique prolific genius.

There remains the important question of Tutuola's reputation in Africa itself. No amount of international acclaim, gratifying though it be, can count for as much in the development of such a writer as the enthusiasm and support of his own people. The progress of his reputation in Africa has been gravely hampered by the manner in which his books have appeared. The imprint of a leading English publisher, though an assistance in the London market, may even be a hindrance in the local one. His books are expensive by Nigerian standards; 10/6 or 12/6 are prices that young Nigerians may be accustomed to pay for a text-book that will help them directly in examinations but not for "a mere story-book." Moreover, his publishers are a firm generally associated with the "high-brow" in literature and the dust-jackets of these books, excellent in themselves, reflect this. For these reasons the number of Nigerians who have discovered Tutuola from the bookshelves unaided must be fairly small. Last year I had the experience of lecturing to a large audience of adult students and finding that few of them had even heard Tutuola's name and not one had read any of his books. On the other hand, these same students reacted with delighted wonder and amusement to the reading of extracts from the *Drinkard* and at the end of the lecture were clamouring for copies to buy. Many educated Nigerians, however, are embarrassed by the "mistakes" they find in Tutuola's English, which some of them seem to regard as an undeserved reflection on the African race in general. Their ears, being less sensitive than those of an Englishman to all that has become jaded and feeble in our language, are likewise less able to recognise the vigour and freshness that Tutuola brings to it by his

urgency of expression and refusal to be merely correct. A similar stage to this had been gone through even by the American reading public, though to them English was their native language, and the racy American vernacular, as opposed to "polite" English, did not become respectable till the enormous popularity of Mark Twain had made it so. In view of all these factors, a great service would be done by any publisher imaginative enough to produce cheap paper-backed editions of Tutuola's books and distribute these widely to the little bookshops in West Africa.

Tutuola's value to the rising generation of young African writers is probably that of an example rather than of a model. There are not likely to be two Tutuolas in Africa today, and to write in his manner without comparable visionary power and imaginative intensity would not only be foolish but, for a more fully educated writer, affected as well. The most valuable part of Tutuola's example is his confidence. This confidence transforms even his apparent disadvantages into special virtues, for his fragmentary education is seen to have left him in tune with the great imaginative life of his race, whilst his command of West African idiom enables him to create a style at once easy and energetic, naive and daring. By going into himself Tutuola has rediscovered the great common soil of literature, which mere imitation of its currently branching peculiarities and variations in England or America could never have shown him. Imitativeness is the besetting temptation of Nigerian writers at present; but Tutuola has set all chance models aside and, refreshed like Antaeus by contact with his abiding Mother Earth, has forged matter, form and style again for himself.



THREE POEMS

BY GABRIEL OKARA

SPIRIT OF THE WIND

The storks are coming now —
white specks in the silent sky.
They had gone north seeking
fairer climes to build their homes
when here was raining.

They are back with me now —
Spirits of the wind,
beyond the gods' confining
hands they go north and west and east,
instinct guiding.

But willed by the gods
I'm sitting on this rock
watching them come and go
from sunrise to sundown, with the spirit
urging within.

And urging, a red pool stirs,
and each ripple is
the instinct's vital call,
a desire in a million cells
confined.

O God of the gods and me,
shall I not heed
this prayer-bell call, the noon
angelus, because my stork is caged
in Singed Hair and Dark Skin?

THE CALL OF THE RIVER NUN. I hear your call
I hear it far away
I hear it break the circle
of these crouching hills;

I hear your call
I want to view your face
again and feel your cold
embrace or at your brim
to set myself
and inhale your breath
or like the trees to watch
my mirrored self unfold
and span my days
with song from the lips of dawn

I hear your call
I hear it coming through
invoking the ghost of a child
listening where river-birds hail
your silver surfaced flow.

I hear your call
My river's calling too
Its ceaseless flow impels
my found' ring canoe down
its inevitable course.

And each dying
year brings near the sea-birds
call the final call
that stills the crested waves
and breaks in two the curtain
of silence of my upturned canoe

O inevitable God
Shall my pilot be
my inborn stars to that
final call to Thee
O my river's complex course.

WERE I TO CHOOSE

When Adam broke the stone
and redstreams ragged down to
gather in the womb,
an angel calmed the storm;

And I, the breath mewed
in Cain, unblinking gaze
at the world without
from the brink of an age

That draws from the groping lips
a breast-muted cry
to thread the years.
(O were I to choose)

And now the close of one
and thirty turns, the world
of bones is Babel, and
the different tongues within
are flames the head
continually burning.

And O of this dark halo
were the tired head free.

And when the harmattan
of days has parched the throat
and skin, and sucked the fever
of the head away,

Then the massive dark
descends, and flesh and bone
are razed. And (O were I
to choose) I'd cheat the worms
and silence seek in stone.

WORLD CONGRESS OF BLACK WRITERS

BY JANHEINZ JAHN

"We are some sixty delegates, come from all the horizons of Africa, America and Europe to respond to the fervent appeal of "Presence Africaine", this glowing fire of black culture. We can claim to represent a vast multitude of human beings, covering a large part of the surface of the earth, particularly in Africa. We are all distinguished—or nearly all—by an indelible peculiarity: the more or less dark colour of our skin.

Of this peculiarity, the hateful commercialism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries took advantage, in order to send millions of our ancestors into slavery across the atlantic.

But the course of the world has returned full circle, and through an extreme irony of fate it is this very same distinctive sign that we use in this twentieth century to affirm, exalt and glorify the culture of the black peoples. This Congress has no other objectives."

With these words, Dr. Price-Mars, the 80 year old principal of the University of Haiti opened the first World Congress of Black Writers and Artists. The Congress took place in September 1956 in the dignified buildings of the Sorbonne, the ancient University of Paris. The Congress had been called and organized by Dr. Alioune Diop (Senegal) who is a teacher in Paris and also editor of the cultural Journal "Presence Africaine". He had called together delegates from many countries: from the Cameroons, Nigeria, Guinea, Togoland, Angola, Mozambique, Madagascar and the Senegal; from the Ivory Coast and the Sudan, from the Carribean Islands, Haiti, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Barbados and Jamaica, and from the United States of America. It was an important event. Alioune Diop pointed out the importance of the day in his opening speech:

"This day will be marked with a milestone. Since the end of the War the Bandoeng Conference constitutes the most important event in the minds of the non-European peoples. I believe I can affirm that this first Congress of Black intellectuals will represent for our people the second important event of this decade."

This congress is of special interest to the readers of this journal. Not only the result is important: that people from so many different countries, hold-

ing so many different views, could at last agree on some common resolutions; it is equally important, that they were able to meet each other, and they could return home with the assurance of not being alone in their struggle for cultural emancipation. It was painful to remark, however, that the many famous authors who spoke on African culture and its problems, in spite of the reputation they had made for themselves in Western and Central Europe, were almost unknown to their black brothers in Africa and America. The greatest black authors writing in the French language, Aimée Césaire (Martinique) and Léopold Sédar Senghor (Senegal) are well known in France, and in Central Europe. But in London barely their names are known, and in countries like Nigeria, Ghana or Jamaica they have not even been heard of, although their writings are full of meaning and significance for the peoples of those territories. And again: the Afro-Americans of Cuba amongst whom traditional forms of Yoruba worship have been preserved—like Shango, Obatala, Ogun and Babalu Aiye—have never heard of modern Yoruba writers like Adeboye Babalola or Amos Tutuola, (the latter's books have been translated into several European languages but not into Spanish). And on the other hand: what do Nigerians know about the great Afro-American authors like Nicolas Guillen, Adalberto Ortiz, Marcelino Arozarena, Paul Vesey?

This journal was founded in order to break down some of the language barriers, and to make known the black writers who use the French, Spanish or Portuguese languages in English speaking countries of Africa. Thus we hope to continue with our own modest means the excellent work began by the World Congress of Black Writers, and by the French literary Journal "Presence Africaine", of bringing together authors writing in different languages, to a fruitful exchange of ideas.

The programme of the Congress was most extensive: 27 lectures were given. The first day was devoted to make the inventory of African cultures, the second day was devoted to the crisis in African culture (Culture and Colonialism) and the third day brought the synthesis and final resolution.

Jacques Rabemananjara of Madagascar, who spent nearly ten years in prison after the Madagascar rising in 1947, spoke first on the subject "Europe and We". It was a declaration of love for Europe, though, of course, not an undivided one:

"Europe has inherited the privileges of Janus, she has two faces.

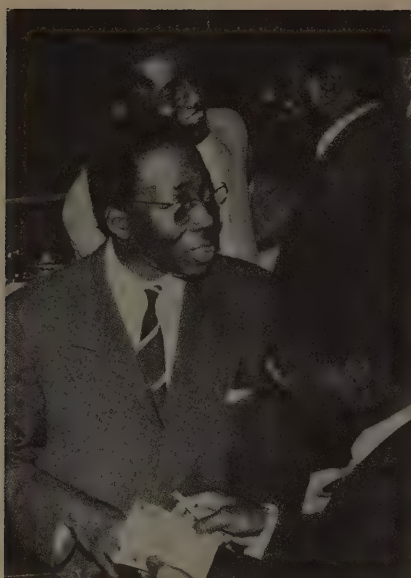
On the one hand a face of stone, of death, a Gorgon's face distorted with cruelty, with cynicism, with deceit and with disproportioned self sufficiency; the face that is the embodiment of the fabricators of 'negro barbarity' or of the experts who supply the human flesh to crematories.

On the other hand a lily face so good, that a certain kingdom chose it as the symbol on its coat of arms, a face of purity, a face of water of source and of dawn, the marvellous impression of the mask of Venus, so beautiful, that it seems to have combined in it the sum of human perfection, for it was



WORLD CONGRESS OF BLACK WRITERS

E. L. Lasebikan demonstrates the Yoruba Talking Drum.



Léopold Sédar Senghor



Aimée Césaire

George Lamming



Richard Wright



the first to open our consciences to the luminous principles of human rights."

Paul Hazoumé (Dahomey) sang and interpreted the sacred songs of the priests of Abomey. E. L. Lasebikan earned huge applause, when he analysed the principles of Yoruba poetry with the help of the talking drum.

Then the poet Léopold Sédar Senghor gave a remarkable analysis of the spirit of the ancient African cultures. These were his main points:

Negro African art has three principles:

1) It is a functional art. Sculpture finds its perfection only in connection with the rhythm of dance and chanted poem.

2) In black Africa every form of literature and every form of art is poetry.

3) Negro African art and literature are 'engaged'. They engage a person to his society. The artist or poet ties himself through his work to his people, his history, his country, his time; since he is engaged he does not bother to create works for eternity. In Africa there is no "Art for Art's sake", for even art is social.

But Negro art is not purely utilitarian. The African has a sense of beauty. Beauty is to him part of the quality and of the effect of his work. One might call it a functional beauty.

In Africa art is a sensitive participation in a reality, that includes the mystical super-reality. The African tries to capture the spirit of this world through image and rhythm. Image and rhythm are the basic elements of the African style.

The word is the instrument of thought, emotion and action. The spoken word is expression of the force of life, of existence in its totality. The word has magical powers, and can create whatever it invokes.

A characteristic of Negro languages is the richness of their vocabulary. Their vocabulary is extremely concrete. The words are always surrounded by images, meaning is always expressed in symbols. The African image is more than a mere simile, it is used in a magical way, for its suggestive values.

In African poetry one seldom meets abstract conceptions. There is no need to explain the image: the audience has the power of double vision. But the image alone produces no effect on the African, if it is not linked with rhythm. Just as in painting rhythm is produced through lines, colours and shapes, so in poetry rhythm is created by accents.

Senghor concludes his speech with the words:

"The spirit of Negro-African civilization animates, consciously or not, the best Negro artists and writers of today, be they from Africa or America. In the measure in which they are conscious of this and derive their inspiration from Negro-African culture, they can raise themselves to an international level; but in the measure in which they turn their back on mother Africa they degenerate and become flat. This does not mean that African writers and artists of today should turn their back on reality, and refuse to translate the social reality of

their milieu, their race, their nation, their class; on the contrary. We have seen that the spirit of African civilization always embodied itself in the most everyday kind of reality. But always it transcends it in order to express a cosmic sense."

On the second day spoke Hampate Ba (Sudan) about the culture of the Fulani, E. Andrantsilaniarivo (Madagascar) about Madagascar in the 20th century. Dr. Davidson Nicol (Sierra Leone) gave a survey of West African Art and Literature. Frantz Manon (Martinique) talked about racialism and culture and Horace Mann Bond about West African Nationalist Movements:

"In most instances, tribes and ethnic groups which lived a more or less separate and isolated life for centuries, were for the first time, perhaps, placed within one politico-territorial entity and ruled, not as separate tribes, but as an organic whole. The Ibo and Yoruba, though still distinct peoples with different cultures, were now ruled not as Ibos, or Yorubas, but as "Nigerians". Thus the framework has been set for the gradual transformation of the tribal ideology ("tribalism"), into a national ideology ("Nationalism").

I am, of course, not insensible to the former existence, a millennium ago, of great and ancient States in West Africa. But it may here be agreed, that it is going to be extremely difficult to reconstitute such units, geographically, after the long lapse of centuries, and the more recent demarcation of colonial units, almost by "happenstance", that are now potential States. Nor am I ignorant of the threatened fragmentation of such potential States as Nigeria, on the basis of sub-nationalities; a species of "nationalism within nationalism."

Here may I insert the comment, *par passim*, that I am not as sceptical as some, regarding the possibility of developing new and viable States from regions but recently formed by drawing lines on a map; States will be not only viable, but they may be bound together by common loyalties of its citizens to an entity created, perhaps artificially, within the memory of living man. The young learn easily; and I believe the first generation of Africans to become altogether literate, in the Gold Coast that was, that is also the Ghana-to-come, may show a loyalty to the new Nation *quite as passionate as that of the citizens of a Nation several centuries older*. We Americans, who developed a fierce national pride in less than a century (with a Civil War and various rebellions thrown in for good measure), may be less fearful than others, that it is impossible to combine, in a new Nation, Ashanti, Ewe, Fanti, and Ga. Indeed, every growing evidence, is that this is precisely what Dr. Nkrumah and his colleagues have already done!"

Emmanuel Paul (Haiti) showed how the attitude of the anthropologists towards African culture had changed in this century, how all theories of the inferiority of the black races had been found erroneous. William Fontaine (USA) analysed segregation and desegregation in the United States. Ben Enwonwu (Nigeria) outlined the problems of the contemporary African artist, Pastor Thomas Ekollo (Cameroons) expressed his opinion that Christianity could find a new form of expression on African soil:

"Once we shall have our own theologians, once we shall have found an interpretation of the Bible related to our culture (of today and of tomorrow) even if we shall fall into the faults with which we reproach others, our Christianity will yet be our own expression of the Gospel and that will be no small contribution to the problem that preoccupies us."

To round off the second day, Aimee Cesaire read his great paper *Culture and Colonialization*. It was the most important paper of the conference, because it answered basic questions. We must devote some space to this and have to be content, therefore, to give but a brief mention to papers that treated more specialized problems. Louis T. Achille (Martinique) tried to trace the African sources of the Negro Spiritual, Marcus James (Jamaica) tried to explain Christianity as the great creative principle for Africa, Jacques Stephen Alexis (Haiti) developed a colourful panorama of Haitian literature, Dr. Price Mars reported on the survivals of African cultures in the new world, A. Wade (Senegal) talked on legal systems in Africa and the novelist George Lamming (Barbados) about the Negro writer and his World. (He paid special tribute to the Nigerian writer Amos Tutuola: "Mr. Tutuola's work, which I have seen belongs to the world of fantasy and it may seem here a little ironic to consider that the situation of the Negro in some places belongs to the world of a fantastic and concrete brutality. It is, in a sense, a great relief to come upon the Palm Wine Drinkard. And it is not only the wine that helps us. Mr. Tutuola has magic.")

But the most important event of the Congress was the conflict between Aimee Cesaire and Richard Wright, which created much tension at the Congress because it really touched the heart of the matter. The point of contention was the value of African tradition of the culture that Senghor had so brilliantly analysed the day before.

Richard Wright the famous North American author found great heartening words when he addressed the Western peoples:

"The West, in order to keep being western, free, rational, must be prepared to give to the elite of Asia and Africa a freedom which it itself never permitted in its own domain. The Asian and African elite must be given their heads!"

And he concluded his speech with the words:

"Today I say to the white men of Europe: You have, however misguidedly, trained and educated an elite in Africa and Asia. You have implanted in their hearts the hunger for freedom and rationality. Now this elite of yours — your children, one might say — is hard-pressed by hunger, poverty, disease, by stagnant economic conditions, by unbalanced class structures of their societies, by oppressive and irrational tides of tribal religions. You men of Europe made an abortive beginning to solve that problem. You failed. Now, I say to you: Men of Europe, give that elite the tools and let it finish that job!"

But there was also a dissonance in this, because Richard Wright made his appeal only for the "elite" not the peoples of Africa. In his book "Black Power" he had already shown his lack of understanding for the traditional African culture of Ghana. Now he even went to the length of literally thanking the European powers for the destruction of African cultures:

"When I wrote that statement, I was hoping and dreaming, for black freedom. But after listening to the gentleman of the cloth who spoke here this morning describe the African as being incurably religious, I wonder now if I can say that the African is more secular-minded than the West. Will there be a latching on of Western techniques at some point of African religious development?

In the minds of hundreds of millions of Asians and Africans the traditions of their lives have been psychologically condemned beyond recall. Millions live uneasily with beliefs of which they have been made ashamed. I say, "Bravo!" for that clumsy and cruel deed. Not to the motives, mind you, behind those deeds, motives which were all too often ignoble and base. But I do say "Bravo!" to the consequences of Western plundering, a plundering that created the conditions for the possible rise of rational societies for the greater majority of mankind.

"Thank you, Mr. White Man, for freeing me from the rot of my irrational traditions and customs, though you are still the victims of your own irrational customs and tradition!"

Richard Wright presented the problem, as if there was only the alternative: either Europeanization at all costs, which will lead to progress and freedom,—or remaining stuck in "superstition" and eternal servitude. But Césaire showed that the problem was wrongly put:

"One often tries to sum up the problem under the form of a choice one has to make. A choice between indigenous tradition and European civilization. Either to reject the indigenous tradition as childish, inadequate, passed by history, or in order to save the cultural heritage to barricade oneself against European civilization and refuse it.

In other words, we are called upon: choose, choose between loyalty and backwardness on the one hand, and progress and rupture on the other.

What is our response? Our response is that things are not as simple as all that and that there is no alternative. That life (I say life, and not abstract thought) does not know, does not accept that alternative. Or rather, that if this alternative presents itself, it is life that sets out to transcend it. We say that this problem does not pose itself solely in black societies, that in each society there is always a balance between the new and the old, and this balance must always be recreated, and that it is in fact being recreated each generation. Our societies, our civilizations, our cultures cannot escape from this rule.

As far as we are concerned and our particular societies we believe that there shall be many new modern elements (elements borrowed from Europe, if

you like) in the African culture that is to be, or the para African culture that is to be. But we believe also that there will live in these cultures many traditional elements. We refuse to yield to the temptation of the clean table. I refuse to believe that the future African culture would enforce an end of total and brutal non-acceptance in the ancient culture of Africa. And to illustrate what I have been saying, permit me to use a parable: the anthropologists have often described what one of them proposes to call cultural fatigue. The example they quote^a deserves to be called to mind, because this example rises to the level of a symbol. This is the story: it takes place in Hawaii. Some years after the discovery of the Islands by Cook, the king died and was replaced by a young man, the prince Kamehamela II. Having been won over to European ideas, the young prince decided to abolish the ancestral religion. It was decided between the young king and the high priest that a great feast was to be organised and that during this feast the taboo should be solemnly broken and the ancestral gods wiped out. On the appointed day, on a sign of the king, the great priest threw himself on the images of God and trampled on them and broke them to pieces while the gigantic cry went up: the Taboo is broken. Needless to say a few years later the Hawaiians welcomed the Christian missionaries with open arms..... the rest is known. It has become history. In any case this is the most simple and complete example known of a cultural destruction that prepared the way for slavery. Well, then, I ask, is this it, this renunciation by a people of its past, of its culture that is expected of us? I say it plainly: there will not be amongst us a Kamehamela II!

I believe that the civilization that has given Negro sculpture to the world of art, that the civilization that has given original communal institutions to the world of politics and sociology, as for example the village democracy or the age group or family ownership, that negation of capitalism, and so many institutions that bear the stamp of the spirit of solidarity, that this civilization, the same that on another plane has given the world of morals an original philosophy founded on the respect of life and the integration in the cosmos, I refuse to believe that this civilization, insufficient though it may be, must be destroyed and denied as a condition for the renaissance of the black people.

I believe that our particular cultures harbour in them sufficient vitality, sufficient power of regeneration in order to adapt themselves (once objective conditions that have been created for them can be modified) to the conditions of the modern world and can bring to all problems, whatever they may be, political, social, economical, cultural, valid and original solutions, valid because original.

In our future culture there will be without doubt new things and old things. What new elements? What old elements? Here only starts our ignorance. And truly it is not up to the individual to reply to this question. The reply can only be given by the community.

We are here to say and proclaim: "Give the word to the people. Let the black peoples enter the great stage of history."

In spite of the many controversies and differences of opinion all the delegates united in the end in a common resolution.

"We Negro writers, artists and intellectuals of various political ideologies and religious creeds have felt a need to meet at this crucial stage in the evolution of mankind in order to examine objectively our several views on culture and to probe those cultures with a full consciousness of our responsibilities—first, before our own respective peoples, second, before colonial people and those living under conditions of racial oppression, and, third, before all free men of good will.

This Conference urges Negro intellectuals and all justice-loving men to struggle to create the practical conditions for the revival and the growth of Negro cultures.

Paying tribute to the cultures of all lands and with due appreciation of their several contributions to the progress of civilization, the Conference urges all Negro intellectuals to defend, illustrate and publicize throughout the world the national values of their own peoples.

We Negro writers and artists proclaim our fellowship with all men and expect from them, for our people, a similar fellowship."



BOOK REVIEWS

THE DARK CHILD by Camara Laye

Collins, London 1955 12/6

pagan traditions have there been blended organically with Moslem influences. Camara Laye, though being a school child, shared most of the experiences of the common village children, participating in their work and play and undergoing the traditional initiation rites. But as he grew older he was sent to a secondary school in Conakry and later he came to France to study engineering. When his money ran out after some years he had to find work in a car factory. Lonely and depressed he sat down and wrote this nostalgic book about his childhood.

With great sensitivity the author describes his earliest memories and with infinite affection he builds up before our eyes the picture of his parents. His father was a smith and the child spent most of the time hanging around the workshop. The most exciting event was when the father was working gold. Gold being a magical substance such work involved careful preparation on the part of the craftsman and its completion was celebrated with praise singing and the dancing of the 'douga'—a dance reserved for celebrated men. Camara Laye describes charmingly the growing excitement of the woman for whom the trinket was being made. As the work was nearing completion his father, smiling, would turn to her:

"Are you trembling?" he would say to her.

"Am I trembling?" she would ask.

And we would all burst out laughing at her. For she was trembling. His mother was an impressive person. Being born immediately after twins she possessed supernatural powers and was often consulted by the village people in their difficulties. Camara Laye describes her strange deeds simply as he remembers them. He does not attempt to interpret or explain these deeds. They do not really fit into the picture of the world that was given him by European education. Yet he can accept and recognize the beauty and greatness of that other world he has forsaken.

"I do not wish to say more and I have told you only what I saw with my own eyes. These miracles—they were miracles indeed—nowadays I think about them as if they were the fabulous events of a far-off past. That past however is still quite near: it was only yesterday. But the world rolls on and the world changes, my own world perhaps more rapidly than anyone's; so that it appears as if we are ceasing to be what we were and that we were not exactly ourselves even at the time when these miracles took place before our eyes. Yes, the world rolls on and changes. I, too, had my totem, but I no longer remember what it was."

Camara Laye describes life in the Malinke community as an existence full of beauty and meaning. It is a sheltered, protected life. But even at an early age the author became aware of the fact that his own destiny will lead him out of this society. The thought of having to leave his family and his town is a worry to him, but the desire to experience the new and strange life offered to him is too great. The final leave taking, however, is hard. Particularly as his mother does not wish to hear of his going away:

"Your place is here. What *are* they thinking about at the school? Do they imagine that I am going to live my whole life apart from my son? Die with him far away? Have they no mothers, those people? But they can't have mothers, of course. They would not have gone away so far from home if they'd had mothers."

Comparison springs to mind between Camara Laye's "The Dark Child" and the famous autobiography of an American Negro: Richard Wright's "Black Boy". What a contrast between this gentle, nostalgic book and Richard Wright's bitter account of his stubborn childhood.

Camara Laye's youth was happy, he was surrounded with love and affection and grew up in comparative security. Richard Wright's youth was all poverty and hunger and hatred. Camara Laye describes his childhood with a touch of romanticism and he leaves the world of his parents with sadness and regret. Richard Wright describes his own youth with brutal realism and his whole effort is to cast off his past. Camara Laye emerges from these experiences a deeply religious person: "Are there not things around us everywhere, that are incapable of explanation?" Richard Wright emerges as a strict rationalist: "I shall never be able to feel God." The immense difference in background and upbringing between these two writers symbolises the gulf that has arisen between the African and the American Negro and it may help us to understand the failure of Richard Wright to understand the people and the problems of Ghana about which he writes in his book "Black Power."

AKANJI.

BLACK POWER by Richard Wright.

Dennis Dobson, London 25/-

"I was black and they were black but it did not help me." This sentence seems to sum up the tragic failure of the great American Negro writer to comprehend the Africans of Ghana. He had gone to Africa with the vague feeling that he was himself of African descent, and that somehow he might find a relationship and a special understanding. When he discovered the enormous gulf that lay between him and his brethren, the shock was so great that he remained more remote from them than most Europeans or white Americans do.

Of course, he does not make very serious efforts to get to know the people. He walks about like a real tourist with a sunhelmet—apparently unaware that the British have long given up wearing that unpractical piece of headgear. He gives highly exaggerated accounts of the terrible heat. He has

the idea that a trip to Kumasi is a dangerous undertaking: "The more I ask about jungle conditions the more I am dismayed. The general state of affairs in the country is not conducive to the safety of wandering tourists." And again "I knew that barging out into tribal villages alone in a taxi cab was rash". It seems incredible that a man visiting the Gold Coast in 1953 could live under such illusions! Yet in the end when he ventures forth into the "interior" he has his itinerary planned out for him by the Gold Coast Information Service and promises faithfully to stick to it! No wonder that he sees little of the real life of the people and reaches some amazing conclusions for example that there are no works of art left in Ghana! He gives up eating African food after the first attempt and lives in hotels and rest houses; not once did he establish a human relationship intimate enough to enable him to stay in an African home.

He makes it clear in several places in the book, that when questioned about his political views he never committed himself. "I talked for three hours and said absolutely nothing. It was exhausting....." Yet he is deeply annoyed that the Africans he meets are not forthcoming and that they are full of distrust. He does not apparently realize that his behaviour is tactless. He carries on no ordinary conversation with anybody, but attacks everybody with a kind of questionnaire. "What about the golden stool?" He asks the Asantehene. And "What about the God of the Christians?" he asks a Muslim African. He also indulges in an insulting type of "frankness". This is a conversation he has with a shop assistant on the day of his arrival: "Haven't you tried to find out where in Africa you came from sir?" "Well," I said softly, "you know, you fellows who sold us and the white men who bought us didn't keep any records." When he attends an African funeral ceremony in Accra he is being told after a little while: "You'd better go now, sar." This is an experience that very few strangers, white or black, can have had in a country that is as hospitable as Ghana. But he is always building up barriers between himself and the people, by anticipating distrust all the time. "I wanted to break down their reserve and hear what they thought." "Bracing myself to encounter rebuffs, I strayed off the main thoroughfares....."

"Would my rash request make him distrust me?" Thus he is worrying selfconsciously all the time and in the end he projects his own worries and distrust onto the open-minded social Africans and comes out with these truly amazing statements: "I found the African an oblique, a hard to know man.....", "This fear, this suspicion of nothing in particular came to be the most predictable hallmark of the African mentality that I met in all the Gold Coast.....". No wonder that he seems to have derived no pleasure at all from his visit to this exciting country. There are one or two things he admired (notably Nkrumah and the CPP) but there is nothing he really loved. Most of the time he is plainly shocked. Although he makes no bones about his dislike of the British his emotional reactions are stodgier than those of the stodgiest Britisher.

He feels violent repulsion when he sees people urinate in the street (he begins to wonder whether Africans urinate more often than other people) he is shocked by the sight of crippled beggars (wondering whether they deformed themselves deliberately) he is confused by the sight of bare breasts and—being brought up on Hollywood ideas of female beauty—considered the drawn out breasts of old women “deformed.” The sight of men dancing together in a nightclub makes him shudder, even though it is explained to him that there is no homosexuality in Accra. “Intellectually I understood my friends’ all too clear explanation of why boys liked to hold hands and dance together, yet the sight of it provoked in me a sense of uneasiness on levels of emotion deeper than I could control.”

He is indeed temperamentally not well suited to understand Africans. He confesses that he has never been able to dance in his life and when taken to watch a dance in an Accra night club he comments: “Nothing could have been more boring to my temperament than such spectacles.” The part played by dancing in the social and emotional life of the African is incomprehensible to him. Seeing Africans dance at a funeral he concludes that they do not mourn the dead. The whole meaning of traditional African culture escapes him and he shares the most uninformed superstitions of hard baked colonialists in this matter. He believes amongst other things that the Akan did not know the connection between sexual intercourse and childbirth, that all chiefs are scoundrels and that women are bought. While he bitterly resents the British making rude jokes about the natives he gradually adopts a colonial attitude himself: he starts ordering “the native” about. “I found that that was the only way to get any consideration out of a native; he’d been conditioned by the British to being ordered and would obey only when ordered.”

He is somewhat proud that he has no religious convictions whatsoever and it is not surprising therefore that he is out of his depth in discussing Dr. Danquah’s “The Akan Conception of God.” Religion as such seems to him a primitive form of thinking and a great many of the myths and phenomena of Akan religion he groups together under the somewhat unscientific word “juju”—for which he has of course the greatest contempt.

He is far more accurate and understanding in his description and criticism of Europeans. It is not to Africans, by the way, but to Westerners that he is addressing himself in his book. “This book seeks to provide Western readers with some insight into what is going to happen in Africa, so that, when it does happen, they will be able to understand it.”

This does not hinder him, however, ending up his book with good advice to Kwame Nkrumah. “Never again,” he counsels wisely, “must the outside world decide what is good for you.” Yet this is precisely what Mr. Wright is doing, when he, the Westerner, informs the prime minister that there is “but one honourable course that assumes and answers the ideological, traditional, organizational, emotional, political and productive needs of Africa at this time: AFRICAN LIFE MUST BE MILITARIZED!” There is genuine pathos in his voice

when he says: "Our people must be made to walk, forced draft, into the twentieth century." But how strange sound the words "Our people" coming from one who has so badly failed to come close to them. Richard Wright felt the most sincere wish to understand, even to identify himself. But forces were at work against him, stronger than his brilliant intellect. And he remained, alas, a tourist in Ghana: "I wanted to stay here and learn this life, to feel it, to try to find out the values that kept it going. But I didn't like prying out the details. The African had been violated often enough in the dark past. And I had a taxi waiting."

AKANJI.

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